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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005734

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [TU](#) [CY](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY CANCELS EU/OIC FORUM OVER CYPRUS DISPUTE

(U) Classified by Political Counselor John Kunstadter, E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: On September 30, in a dispute with the EU over designation of the Turkish Cypriot observer delegation, Turkey canceled the October 4-5 EU-OIC Joint Forum in Istanbul. The Turkish MFA and the Dutch EU Presidency each claim the other turned down reasonable compromises and ignored the problem until it was too late. EU diplomats in Ankara say the episode will not directly affect Turkey's December bid for a date to begin accession negotiations but has given ammunition to EU Turkey-skeptics. It has also strained relations between the Turks and the Dutch Embassy here. In this incident, Ankara's frustration with the EU trumped what should have been its better judgment. End Summary.

Early Problems

12. (U) That Cyprus would be a problem for the Forum was clear as early as August, when the Turkish MFA invited the "TRNC Ambassador" to a briefing on Forum preparations. The Dutch, as EU President, participated in the briefing but then made a public statement that their participation did not signify recognition of the "TRNC." When the Turks later sent out invitations to the Forum, they did not send one to the Republic of Cyprus; the Dutch stepped in and asked the Turks to invite all EU member states via the Presidency.

13. (C) Although Turkey does not recognize the ROC, the Turks accepted ROC participation in the Forum. They expected the EU to adopt the same stance toward the "TRNC," which Turkey invited under its OIC observer designation as the "Turkish Cypriot State." The EU was willing to have TC observers, but not designated as the "Turkish Cypriot State." Ironically, according to Dutch DCM Bekkers, OIC contacts told the Dutch the OIC was indifferent to the TCs' designation.

Each Blames the Other for Delay, Refusing Compromise

14. (C) The Turkish MFA and the Dutch Embassy both claim they raised the issue with the other side during September, including at the two FonMins' meeting on the margins of UNGA. According to UK Political Chief Sharma, the UK also warned the Turks early on that the designation was going to be a problem. The Dutch and the Turks both claim they clearly indicated they would not back off, but that the other side said there would be no problem. Both sides accused the other of refusing to deal with the issue until it was too late.

15. (C) The EU Presidency refused Turkey's offer that the TCs would use their OIC designation and that EU members or FM Gul would open the Forum with a statement that this did not imply recognition. EU diplomats here tell us that other EU members, including the French, backed that approach, but the GCs shot it down. The Turks refused several EU Presidency proposals for alternate designations of the TCs, or to postpone the Forum until the sides could find a solution.

16. (C) The Turkish MFA blames the Greek Cypriots and the Dutch Presidency for the incident. MFA Cyprus Department Head Bilman called us in October 4 to express Turkish displeasure and give us the MFA's version of events. On the other side, Dutch DCM Bekkers attributed the incident to Turkish misperception that the EU would back down. Bekkers told us a majority of EU members objected to the "Turkish Cypriot State" designation, not just the Greek Cypriots and the Greeks. According to Bekkers, the Dutch told the Turks this, but the Turks remain unconvinced. The truth may be closer to the middle: according to UK Political Chief Sharma, some countries went along with the Greek Cypriots not on principle, but to preserve EU solidarity.

Strained Dutch/Turkish Relations in Ankara

17. (C) All EU diplomats we have talked to here doubt this incident will directly affect Turkey's EU bid. However, Dutch DCM Bekkers thinks that, like the controversy surrounding PM Erdogan's gambit to criminalize adultery, this gives ammunition to EU Turkey-skeptics. "Things like this cost Turkey one extra year in the accession process per incident," he added. Bekkers and other EU diplomats we have

talked to here worry that the Turks still do not understand the EU.

18. (C) Publicly, the MFA and the Dutch are trying to play down the incident. The MFA has not expressed the bitterness toward the Dutch in public that Cyprus Department Head Bilman expressed to us privately. Bekkers says the Dutch want to put the incident behind them and claims it has had no effect on his Embassy's relations with the Turks. Sharma and Bilman disagree, both saying the affair has strained the Dutch/Turkish relationship in Ankara. Communication between the two sides broke down; neither Bekkers nor Bilman understands why the other side acted as it did. Bilman worries about what the incident augurs for EU-related matters. He asked rhetorically what is in store for the near future if the Greek Cypriots managed to derail the Forum over what he called a "non-issue."

Frustration Trumps Ankara's Better Judgment

19. (C) Comment: In this case, Ankara's frustration with the EU, including EU failure to deliver on steps to end the TCs' isolation, trumped what should have been its better judgment. Bilman tried to justify Turkey's stance by saying that Turkey could not give any more "concessions" in light of GC intransigence on trade and aid for the TCs. In this regard, PM Erdogan and FM Gul are under increasing fire from domestic critics for allegedly selling out core Turkish interests. Some EU embassies are concerned at what they see as too hard-line a Dutch approach in this context.

110. (C) Comment (cont'd): However, the name plate was (as Bilman himself noted) a "non-issue" that would have given the TCs nothing. Moreover, the GOT's stance cuts against its assertion that it is not seeking recognition for the "TRNC." The echo of this incident will fade. However, the poor communication between the GOT and Dutch Presidency (which continues in Ankara through June 2005 due to lack of a Luxembourg representation here) does not bode well for avoidance of miscommunication or missteps in the months to come. End Comment.
EDELMAN